

Key Stage 3

Drama Lesson Plan - Spitfire Girls

Joining the War Effort: Exploring *Spitfire Girls*

Learning Objectives:

- Students will explore the historical context of women in the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) during World War II
- Students will develop empathy for the characters in *Spitfire Girls*, considering the challenges they faced
- Students will work collaboratively to create and present performances
- Students will use textual evidence from the play to inform their understanding of character and context

Key Concepts:

Historical Context: Understanding the role of the ATA and the historical significance of women pilots during WWII.

Character Development: Exploring the motivations, relationships, and challenges faced by the characters.

Dramatic Techniques: Using improvisation, vocal and physical skills, and narration to explore themes.

Empathy and Perspective: Considering the impact of war, loss and risk through the perspectives of the characters in *Spitfire Girls*.

Resources:

Script Extract One from *Spitfire Girls* (below)

Large open space for movement

Whiteboard & markers

Lesson Activities:

I. Introduction (10 minutes):

Begin with a brief discussion about WWII and the roles women played. Ask students what they already know about women's contributions to the war effort. Make a list of the roles they contributed on the board and have a discussion about the range of skills women needed to contribute in each of these ways.

You can find some useful information [here](#) to prompt discussions.

Introduce the Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA) and explain their role in ferrying aircraft. Briefly introduce the play *Spitfire Girls*, highlighting that it's based on the real-life experiences of female ATA pilots. You could show a short clip from the [Spitfire Girls Behind the Scenes Video](#). There is more information available in our free education pack, available on our [website](#).

2. Character Introduction (20 minutes):

Divide students into groups of three and give each group a copy of Script Extract One (Scene 4) from *Spitfire Girls*, focusing on the relationship between Bett, Dotty and their Father.

In their groups, ask the students to read Script Extract One and discuss the characters. What are their personalities and motivations? How do they interact with each other? What challenges do they appear to face?

Have each student select one or two key quotes that illuminate their character to share with their group. Have students share with their group what they believe to be their character's motivation in this extract.

Have each group develop two freeze frames to portray the relationship between the sisters and their father at the beginning of the scene and at the end of the scene.

3. Improvisation: Character Narration (25 minutes):

Explain to the students that the women had to train as pilots in a short period of time and that what they were undertaking was enormously risky, but their desire to help the war effort made them brave enough to volunteer for these roles anyway. Bett and Dotty had a particularly pertinent example of how frightening and traumatising the war could be, through their Father's experience in World War One.

Using Script Extract One, ask students to create a performance of the scene, but include narration to explore the deeper feelings of the characters. In their groups of three, students will stage this scene between the family members, but add in moments of freeze frame in which each character breaks the fourth wall and narrates their internal thoughts to the audience at several points through the scene. This might include their character's deeper thoughts, more honest reflections or things they are afraid to say out loud to one another.

Encourage students to think about the challenges the women faced. What physical, mental or emotional pressures did they face as they made the decision to sign up for these roles? What memories does their Father have that he is afraid to share with his daughters? What worries him the most about the girls leaving home to work for the ATA? After a period of improvisation, have each group share their scenes for the class.

4. Reflecting (5 minutes):

Gather the students and facilitate a brief discussion.

What did they learn about the challenges that faced women who wanted to contribute to the war effort?
What did they learn about the challenges their family members faced, knowing the risks they were taking?

How did they develop empathy for their character through this exercise?

EXTENSION DISCUSSION: What type of reactions do you think the women would have faced from other people in their lives? Their friends? Their parent's friends? Their teachers or employers? The men in their community who could not serve as soldiers in the war? Male pilots? Senior members of the ATA?

5. Homework (20 minutes):

WRITTEN REFLECTION PROMPTS:

TERMINOLOGY BANK:
<i>Pitch Pace Tone Volume Accent Emphasise Projection Diction Articulation Breath control Accent Posture Eye contact Mime Carriage Facial expression Levels Gesture Body language Proxemics Stillness</i>

Following on from today's lesson;

- I felt I was able to communicate my character's feelings of _____ and _____ by using my vocal and physical skills to...
- Our group communicated tension effectively by....
- A moment which stood out from another group's performance was when_____. It was effective because...
- I was able to better understand the challenges that the character's faced. It made me think about....

Teacher Assessment:

Observe student participation in group discussions and improvisation activities.

Student Name:	Level:
AO1: Students create and develop ideas to communicate meaning for a theatrical performance	
AO2: Apply theatrical skills to realise artistic intentions in live performance	
AO3: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how drama and theatre is developed and performed.	
AO4: Analyse and evaluate their own work and the work of others.	

Extension Activities:

Students could write a short monologue directed to the audience from the perspective of their character following on from Scene 4.

Students could create a visual piece of artwork inspired by their character's thoughts and feelings at the end of Scene 4.

Students could research fashion of the time and create costume designs for each character in their group.

Students could imagine they are a Director and annotate their copy of the script with their directorial intentions for each character in the scene.

This lesson aims to be engaging and practical, encouraging students to explore the historical context and human stories within Spitfire Girls through active participation in drama. The lesson could be adapted to suit a variety of class sizes and learning environments.

Script Extract One

Scene 4 - Spitfire Girls

CAST: DOTTY
BETT
DAD

1943. A couple of weeks later. The kitchen. **DOTTY** enters carrying a letter.

DOTTY BETT! BETT! Where the bloody hell is she? Bett?!

BETT *(off)* What?!

DOTTY BETT!

BETT *(Off)* What?!

DOTTY Where are you?!

BETT *(Off)* I'm on the bleedin' lav!

DOTTY Well, can you hurry it up?!

BETT *(Off)* Not really, no!

DOTTY Alright then, I'll come to you!

BETT *(Off)* Nooo! I'm coming! *(entering whilst fixing herself)* Blimey O'Reilly. What is it that can't wait for me to finish the most basic of tasks?

DOTTY Uh. Excuse me, did you wash your hands, young lady?

BETT Well, I thought the Germans had arrived so didn't think it necessary.

She wipes her hand down Dotty's cheek.

DOTTY You're so immature.

BETT I do try. So? What had to wreck my one moment of solitude?

DOTTY *(revealing the letter)* I got in. I only bloody got in!

BETT Oh.

DOTTY Did you...?

BETT I've not heard.

DOTTY Oh. Really?

BETT Not a dicky bird.

DOTTY Why? I wonder why?

BETT Too short?

DOTTY Hmm....

BETT Too old?

DOTTY Oh, Bett...

***BETT** smiles.*

 You're pulling my leg, aren't you?

***BETT** nods.*

DOTTY You little-

BETT I'm sorry but your face was a picture.

DOTTY We're in. We did it.

BETT We bloody did it!

DOTTY We're heading for the sky...

They hug.

 Let me see then. Where's your letter?

DAD *(Bellowing)* BETT!

BETT Oh god.

DAD BETT!

BETT I think I left it on the sideboard...

DAD enters.

DAD Bett.

DOTTY Dad-

DAD Dorothy, I am having this conversation with Bett, not you.

DOTTY I know, Daddy but-

DAD Dorothy, will you please stay out of it?

BETT Dad.

DAD I tell you, Elizabeth. You've done it this time.

DOTTY *(whispers to BETT pointedly)* Elizabeth...

DAD I know you think you're wise and worldly but answering this ad was perhaps the most foolish thing you have ever done.

BETT Here we go

DOTTY Dad

BETT Just my luck, eh Dot?

DAD You will need that and much more if you get up in a bloody aeroplane whilst our skies are littered with enemies waiting to shoot you down.

BETT They are the very reason I want to get up in a bloody aeroplane-

DAD You talk as though you'll be fighting them yourself.

BETT I know I won't be

DAD You're willing to risk your life, to be a bloody delivery driver!

BETT I know I won't be on the frontline.

DAD You are not doing it.

BETT I'm sorry, but I am.

DAD You've never even stepped inside an aeroplane let alone flown one.

BETT I know! Exciting, isn't it?

DAD You certainly have no understanding of the power of an aircraft.

BETT You only have yourself to blame for that.

DAD You have not the first idea about flying.

BETT That doesn't matter. "Ab initio," the ad said.

Beat

DOTTY Which means "From the beginning"

DAD Yes, yes I know what it bloody means, thank you.

DOTTY Right-o. Good, good.

DAD Do you realise the state that our Royal Air Force is in?
Why do you think the ATA is calling on young women, like you?

BETT To fix the mess?

DAD Because all the healthy young men are in fighter aircrafts being shot from the sky left, right and bloody centre. You're behind the men who are missing limbs and eyes. They're bloody desperate.

BETT Exactly, they need us-

DAD They need any bloody one with a beating heart!

BETT (*your turn*) Don't they, Dot?

Beat

DOTTY What?

DAD What?

DOTTY What?

DAD Dot.

DOTTY Now don't be cross...

DAD No, Dorothy. Please, not you.

BETT What does he mean by that?

DOTTY I'm sorry Daddy.

DAD Absolutely not.

DOTTY We can look out for each other

DAD No, no

DOTTY If we both go.

DAD What do you think this is, Dorothy? A bloody jolly?

BETT That's what I said.

DOTTY Whose side are you on?

DAD It's war, Dorothy. A bloody war. Not even your brilliant imagination could conjure up what these men are facing. The sky looks very different from the seat of a war aircraft. It's like nothing you've ever known.

DOTTY Then tell me.

DAD You cannot begin to imagine the things that I've seen. The things I see.

DOTTY It's not for the want of trying. We've tried, Daddy. We all tried.

DAD You will never understand. (*To BETT*) This was your idea, I take it?

BETT I told her not to post it.

DOTTY You two are incredible.

DAD You are not going, Dorothy.

DOTTY Please-

DAD I won't allow it.

DOTTY Please-

DAD And that's the end of it.

DOTTY I'm not your little girl anymore.

Beat

Try to understand why I need to do this.

DAD I cannot fathom for one moment.

DOTTY Because she would have done it.

Beat.

DAD She would
She would absolutely not agree to this.

BETT and DOTTY look at DAD. They don't know what else to say.

If you disobey me...

Beat.

Please. Dorothy. Elizabeth.

DAD looks at both of them. He is spent. He carefully folds BETT's letter back together and places it on the table and leaves. DOTTY and BETT look at each other. They hold hands.

END SCENE